

VZCZCXRO7898
PP RUEHBI
DE RUEHLM #1973/01 3281510
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 241510Z NOV 06
FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4806
INFO RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 9637
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 6567
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 4624
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 3345
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 0270
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO 3434
RUEHSM/AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM 0463
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 2522
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI 7108
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI 4915
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 1542
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RHHMUNS/COMSOPAC HONOLULU HI
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
RUCAACC/USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RUCQSOC/USCINCSOC MACDILL AFB FL
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RHHMUNA/USCINCPAC HONOLULU HI

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 COLOMBO 001973

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/24/2016
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [PREF](#) [MOPS](#) [CE](#)
SUBJECT: SRI LANKA MONITORING MISSION CONFIRMS CEASEFIRE
VIOLATIONS BY ARMY

REF: A) COLOMBO 1884 B) COLOMBO 1958 (AND PREVIOUS)

Classified By: Ambassador Robert O. Blake, Jr., for reasons 1.4(b,d).

11. (C) Summary: Pol Chief met November 24 with Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) policy advisor (and occasional acting spokesperson) Helen Olafsdottir and Spokesperson Thorfinnur Omarsson to discuss recent cease-fire violation, the human rights situation, and the mission's current functioning and future. The SLMM representatives confirmed that Government of Sri Lanka (GSL) had killed five students in Vavuniya on November 19 in an apparent reprisal against local civilians for a Tamil Tiger (LTTE) claymore bomb attack. They expressed concern that the LTTE breakaway Karuna faction is operating with impunity in Batticaloa and Vavuniya. They expect the security forces to try to evict the LTTE from Vakaraai, where the Tigers are holding 30,000 civilians hostage. Meanwhile, a shrill anti-SLMM campaign in media close to the government appears intended to force the SLMM to adopt a lower public profile. End Summary.

SLMM concerned about Army move on Vakaraai

12. (C) On November 9, the Sri Lanka Army (SLA), allegedly returning LTTE fire, hit a school in the eastern town of Vakaraai in which several hundred conflict and tsunami internally displaced persons (IDPs) were taking refuge (ref a). However, the SLMM told us on November 24 that "no one had fired from Vakaraai before the SLA shelled the school, which was a welfare center well-known to the Batticaloa government agent." SLMM Senior Advisor Helen Olafsdottir thought it possible the salvos could have come from multi-barreled rocket launchers much further away, near Trincomalee, which would help explain the inaccurate fire. In the SLMM assessment, "the GSL wants to take Vakaraai so that it can control the east coast, so they wanted to scare the civilians into leaving. The LTTE, in turn, is keeping the civilians there." Olafsdottir added, "The GSL will take Vakaraai and then want to sit down for talks. But we're heading toward full-scale war."

Army responsible for student killings

13. (C) The killing of five students and wounding of eleven others in Vavuniya on November 19, Olafsdottir said, was certainly the work of Sri Lankan Army soldiers, not the "lone policeman" who later came forward to take responsibility (ref b). SLMM Monitors in Vavuniya heard a large LTTE claymore explode within 2.5 kilometers of their office, and reached the scene within ten minutes. The monitors reported that soldiers were still standing in the yard of the agricultural school when the SLMM vehicles approached. The monitors spoke to the remaining students at the scene. Eyewitnesses reported that the students threw themselves on the ground when they heard the claymore. Ten to fifteen soldiers,

evidently on foot patrol behind the vehicle hit by the claymore jumped over the fence of the school. They shot the students who looked up first in the back of the head. Another was made to stand up, beaten with a gun, then shot dead. The soldiers then sprayed the area with bullets. When monitors arrived at the scene, one boy was holding a dead girl in his arms, screaming, and trying to lift her over the fence. Olafsdottir said, "it was a fresh scene. No one

COLOMBO 00001973 002 OF 003

could fake that."

Karuna, EPDP "Cleaning Up"

14. (C) In Batticaloa, Olafsdottir told us, the Karuna group openly carries arms in front of monitors, indicating they "enjoy the support of the local battalions." Karuna cadres have threatened the SLMM's local staff there, causing two to leave SLMM employment. She added that in addition to being a paramilitary, the Karuna group is "a growing criminal mafia" running extortion rings in Negombo, Vavuniya and the east.

15. (C) Olafsdottir said that the rise in killings and abductions in Jaffna is "alarming. The Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP) is roaming around at night in white vans, 'cleaning up' LTTE supporters. In Colombo, the white vans belong to Karuna. This is not the way the LTTE does business."

Posturing Against SLMM

16. (C) Olafsdottir believed that Defense Secretary Gothabaya Rajapaksa was orchestrating a campaign against her and the SLMM in government-owned and nationalist media (ref b). Gothabaya, she said, was pressuring GSL Peace Secretariat head Palitha Kohona "to control the SLMM and keep us quiet. He (Kohona) warned us twice not to speak to the media." She noted that editor Bandula Jayasekara of the government newspaper Daily News, which has published stories critical of Olafsdottir and monitors in Batticaloa, is a close friend of Kohona's. Likewise, authors of critical stories in the nationalist Island newspaper are close friends of Defense spokesman Keheliya Rambukwella, who has threatened to have Olafsdottir thrown out of the country (ref b). Olafsdottir said that the SLMM was expecting a directive from the Norwegian and Icelandic Ministries of Foreign Affairs to limit public statements over the next few months.

17. (C) Acting Foreign Secretary Geetha de Silva told Ambassador on November 24 that she had called in the acting head of SLMM that day. She noted the government's concern about the negative media commentaries on the SLMM, saying that it was also harmful for the GSL. The Peace Secretariat (SCOPP) had also written to the SLMM to clear the air. According to de Silva, the SLMM told her it would change its spokesman and also agreed to holding a more frequent dialog with SCOPP.

GSL Limiting Access, EU-member
Monitors Reluctant to Return

18. (C) Olafsdottir and Omarsson noted that the departure of EU-member Danish, Finnish and Swedish monitors on September 30 has not reduced the SLMM's capabilities as much as expected. The SLMM had dealt with the reduced resources by ceasing to monitor naval incidents, and Iceland and Norway had sent a few more monitors to fill the gap. Overall strength of the mission now stands at 35, they said. Moreover, "the GSL has limited our operational capacity" by blocking SLMM access to crucial conflict sites including Vakaraai, Sampur, and the Muhamalai Forward Defense Line (FDL) on the Jaffna peninsula. Olafsdottir added, "the violence is

COLOMBO 00001973 003 OF 003

also such that we have had to scale down our work." She thought the Finns and Danes would be reluctant to return to the mission because of the escalating level of violence. However, if the LTTE could be persuaded to reconsider its ban on monitors from EU member states, the Swedes might consider returning.

19. (C) COMMENT: Bringing in monitors from states other than the Scandinavians named in the 2002 Ceasefire Agreement is probably not a viable option at this point. Reopening parts of the CFA might mean renegotiating the whole, which would be an unwelcome distraction from addressing final settlement questions. In any case, in the current environment, such a renegotiation would likely fail. However, our SLMM interlocutors thought it worth a try to ask the Tigers to reconsider and allow the EU monitors to return to the mission. Either Norwegian Special Envoy Hanssen-Bauer or the SLMM monitors themselves could make the approach.

BLAKE